

President + Dutler

The Commission
for
Relief in Belgium

Address
February 10th 1915
by
Mr. Lindon W. Bates
Vice-Chairman
of the
Commission for Relief in Belgium



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IT was the third week of October. A hurricane of fire had swept an heroic land. To the East a wall of steel which none could pierce. West the molten front of craters, which none could pass. North a sea which none could gain. South the mountains whence came the endless legions of the victors. Thus hemmed six and a half millions of embodied souls! By the importunate and strident will of our American Minister, seconded by the envoys of Spain and Italy and by the grace of saving goodness in the conquering keepers of the gates, those who were about to die were enabled to send out salutations and appeal: appeal not for charity, not to professional philanthropy, but an appeal to the love of all the world, an appeal to live—Love whose outpourings now freight the seven seas. The neutral Ministers standing to their posts in Brussels—accredited the Mission of the appeal to the American, Spanish and Italian Ambassadors in London who rallied to their group, the American Ambassadors to Germany and France, our Minister to Holland and the consuls of all their nations in the zone of imminent disaster.

Thus it began. Then with bewildering quickness came the diplomatic, the naval and military agreements, the conventions published and unpublished, between the belligerent nations. These treaties are the charter of that creation like unto no other that ever was—the Commission for Relief in Belgium.

It was founded to deal not with causes but with effects. The keystone of its arch was neutrality. To be unneutral, to be partisan, were to put a helpless multitude in hopeless peril. It was given its

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Constitution, and its Governors. The Commission for Relief in Belgium includes the American Commission for Relief in Belgium, the Italian Commission, the Spanish Commission, and the Comité National (de Secours et d'Alimentation). Its official status was from the start thus insured. It was granted by the German Government not only the sole right to transport food into Belgium but given the active sympathy and aid of the German military authorities. Despite reports to the contrary, not one pound of food sent in has been appropriated. The treasury of the Commission draws from the generous heart of the world. Into this treasury has been put also all that the enveloped Belgian race could gather of the remnants of their shattered fortunes. It registers their struggle for survival. It represents their very all—the all that the better-to-do can give to help themselves and unreservedly to help their fellow beings in the ranks already destitute and starving. This is our main purchasing fund—the greatest and the sacredest of all the donations.

The Commission is one hundred and eleven days old. It began with no organization whatever. It became responsible for feeding six and a half millions of people. Six and a half millions are the numbers of the contending armies—the perfection of whose commissaries is the studied preparation of thirty years. Their supply was at hand, the nearest of ours a thousand leagues across the ocean; they had their towers and treasuries of gold, we were moneyless, foodless, shipless—beggars in all lands and seas. To secure but ten ounces of food a head—less than one-fourth of the ration actually consumed in New York City—a 6,000-ton ship loaded with foodstuffs must be dispatched every forty-eight hours.

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This was the problem which one hundred and eleven days ago the Commission undertook to solve. It has a growing navy now—a fleet of sixty ships, the safest in the world. It has a new flag, banners and burgees—white with red letters, its visible safeguards in the zones of war. The British, French and German Admiralties all have conferred upon its ships the rights of Safe Conduct over and under sea and through the water aisles of the mine fields to Rotterdam. The Dutch Government furnished the indispensable facilities for unloading; this Government not alone supplied these facilities, but, in a period of emergency, loaned the Commission ten thousand tons of food purchased for Holland itself.

The Commission has its armies without arms, bearing life, not death; an army of givers in America, in Canada, in Argentine, New Zealand, Australia, India, Burmah—all round the earth—an army gathering and bearing tribute to those encompassed by water and by fire. In the United States, its organization reaches the smallest hamlets. Wherever there is a parcel post station there is displayed by courtesy of the Government a placard indicating the means by which any one who chooses to make the smallest donation may send it to the Commission.

All the Express Companies in the United States have made a special two-thirds rate, and in every express office, the Commission's placards have been posted and food will be received. The food so collected goes to the nearest of one hundred Inland Storage Depots, where these small packages are assembled into carload lots for transport to seaboard. The Commission has its shipping agents in fourteen different ports, including Portland, Me.; Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Norfolk, Newport News, Charleston, New Orleans, San Pedro, San Francisco, Portland, Ore.; Seattle and Tacoma.

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From each of these ports ships of the Commission carry the donated food that has been assembled.

The Commission purchases food from funds sent it from all the world, from the Spanish and Italian Commissions, by individuals and Committees in the United States, and from the Trust-fund bestowed by the Belgians themselves.

The Commission from America has to date handled, or arranged for, a total of 292,000 tons of food already transported or to be carried in forty-eight ships. To date there have been unloaded at Rotterdam 97,000 tons from United States ports. There are six steamers in transit carrying 40,450 tons more. The Commission has three steamships representing 21,900 tons now being loaded in various ports. It has eleven ships in transit to America to carry 64,300 tons of cargo. It has eleven ships of 68,600 tons on charter for early loading. Our Canadian Branch has sent food and clothing to the value of \$1,745,563 in five ships and ten shipments in liners.

All the ships go to Rotterdam. An army of stevedores discharges them into another fleet of hundreds of canal boats. The barges go through the canal net-work of Belgium, each boat covered by the flag.

In Belgium our last army takes charge—volunteer distributors, many, many thousands, captained by young Americans. Most are young college men—the Rhodes Scholarship group furnishing several. The food is issued twice daily under a carefully adjusted system of distribution. The five million people in Belgium who still can buy supplies pay the cost price for what they get. This money returns to the Commission and is re-invested. The number of those who can pay is diminishing daily. There are now 1,500,000 absolutely destitute, who receive food at bread-lines. The men, women and children

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who at this very moment are standing one behind the other waiting for the supper dole would make a line 600 miles long. Every day as the number who can pay diminishes, the bread-line lengthens. Within a few months the line will be 2,500 miles long—which would reach from New York to Salt Lake City.

To feed the destitute requires at present \$100,000 a day, nearly \$3,000,000 a month, or at the rate of \$36,000,000 a year. This was about the annual rate of appropriations for the Panama Canal construction. When, in a few months, all the Belgians are destitute, it will take \$12,000,000 a month, \$144,000,000 a year, four times the annual expenditure for the Canal. Already in addition to all that is donated we are expending \$6,000,000 per month.

On the cards which will be passed to you, you will see the records of distribution to families in one of the Brussels agencies. Each destitute family receives such a card on which is stamped the record of "rations received." You will note that two of the successive spaces are blank. This indicates that for two distributions the Commission was not able to give food and they went without any whatever.

Several of these cards show other similar blanks. You can judge of the insufficient reserves and how pitifully small is our margin of safety.

It is natural that the appeal for infants should meet the readiest response. The babies and young children have far the best provision. At the very first, the Commission gathered into a large number of dairies all the milch cows it was possible to find. These cows it has fed with corn from Argentine, and bran from the American wheat which was sent and milled in the flour mills of Belgium. In addition, the Commission has bought nearly 4,000,000

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cans of condensed milk. There have been donated about 400,000 more. The war babies and the little children have provision for three months, but the others for less than four weeks!

The heads of all departments of the Commission give their entire time free. The offices, warehouses and docks are also donated or leased for a nominal rental. The services of shipping agents and chartered accountants are in a large part donated. American railroads have transported much of the food without charge, and many firms have contributed to the office equipment.

The Commission is absolutely the only medium through which food can go into Belgium. An organization thinking of working independently was informed by the German military authorities that the Commission was alone permitted for the purpose and that they would moreover guarantee the entire consumption by the German Army of all stores brought in by others.

The Commission's work is under a daily audit of all receipts and expenditures, as is likewise the distribution system in Belgium. It comprises fifty-five members and has offices in London, New York, Rotterdam, Brussels, Antwerp and other Belgian cities.

The Commission has diplomatic relations with seven governments. These add to other courtesies that of waiving censorship over its correspondence. Its transactions and diplomacy, its accounts and doings are open to the entire world. In America it is organized by States. Most of its committees have been appointed by the Governors and in several the Governor is acting chairman. Each State is autonomous, collecting food and clothes, and money to buy food, the money being mostly expended within the communities contributing it. The transportation fund enables it to have every contributed cent

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converted into food. The great shiploads that have sailed in the names of many States have been detailed in the press—they are not chronicled here. But all that America has donated, 75,000 tons, including the "Foundation" gifts, would not have fed the Belgians one single month.

The Woman's Section was created upon request of the Ambassadors and collective Commission. It planned to enlist the great organizations of women. Between November 10th and December 10th it had secured the co-operation of Presidents of organizations, International, National and State, representing over six millions of women. It has to-day twenty-one National organizations, a number never before in the world's history rallied to any cause. Twenty-eight State Federations of Clubs are standing with it. It has thirty-three States well organized. In several sections it has led the way for the men, and everywhere it has been helpmate and inspiration. In twenty-three of the thirty-three organized States the chairmanship is held by the President of the Federation of Clubs or by some one whom she has designated to represent her. In four others the chairman was selected by the Governor. In one other the wife of the Governor is the honorary and herself chose the acting chairman. In New York the wife of our Governor is serving upon the committee in charge of Albany County. She sent a consignment for the New York State ship which sails the first week in March. The Woman's Section seeks nothing for itself; it asks of its organizations that they focus influence and energy in their own localities in co-operation with the State Committee's efforts. The loaded trains have gathered to many wharves, and the Mercy Ships have sailed from many ports. Unlabeled and unclaimed of our women, they have sped to bless and rescue.

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On the far horizon where the sea and the heavens are one is the dream-fleet of October, transmuted into reality by the helping work of the women of the States inspired as we, too, have been by our Woman's Section.

We, who are of the Commission, realize that we work feverishly before an advancing wall of lava. The black stream bears upon its wrinkled front, annihilation for the "Little Sister of the World." May we be strong to save. She stands at Armageddon and we battle for the Lord!

The Commission for Relief in Belgium

71 Broadway, New York

American Commission for Relief in Belgium
Spanish Commission for Relief in Belgium
Italian Commission for Relief in Belgium
Comite National de Secours et D'Alimentation

Honorary Chairmen

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The American Ambassador in London

His Excellency James Gerard
The American Ambassador in Berlin

His Excellency William G. Sharp
The American Ambassador in Paris

His Excellency
Senor Don Alfonso Merry Del Val Y Zulueta
The Spanish Ambassador in London

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The Woman's Section

No. 1 Madison Avenue, New York
Mrs. Lindon Bates, *Chairman*
Miss Anne Morgan, *Treasurer*

Auditors and Accountants

Deloitte, Plender, Griffiths & Co.
New York and London

Bankers

National City Bank
55 Wall Street, New York
Guaranty Trust Co.
140 Broadway, New York